

Washington, D.C. — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) announced today that World War II veteran Joseph Zabaldo will receive the Gold Lifesaving Medal, which he earned for heroic actions off the Japanese coast over 58 years ago but never received. The U.S. Coast Guard will be on hand to help present the medal in a ceremony on Wednesday, July 23.

“I am very pleased to be able to honor Joseph Zabaldo, an Oregon resident and hero,” Blumenauer said. “This medal is awarded only for the most courageous and selfless actions.”

Zabaldo earned the medal for his actions on July 1, 1945, when his B-29 bomber crashed in the Pacific Ocean near Japan during a mission. Zabaldo, a radioman, was assembled with his fellow crew members in a life raft when he noticed another crewman trapped in the wreckage, tangled up among wires and cables. Zabaldo swam to the crewman’s rescue, untangled him from the sinking plane, and brought him back to safety.

For his actions, Zabaldo was awarded the Coast Guard’s Gold Lifesaving Medal, a prestigious award given to only a few hundred people since 1876. However, the war was still in progress, and a mix-up prevented him from ever receiving the award. Zabaldo, who now suffers from terminal cancer, has been trying to receive his long-lost medal for several years.

Zabaldo’s grandson, Jared Zabaldo of Gresham, contacted Congressman Blumenauer on his grandfather’s behalf earlier this year, as Zabaldo’s earlier attempts to have the medal issued had failed. Blumenauer was able to expedite the process so that Zabaldo could receive the medal Wednesday.